

undated

Dobson, R. H.

Chaucer's translation

B29737

University of Alberta Library



0 1620 3448202 4

For Reference

NOT TO BE TAKEN FROM THIS ROOM

HOLLINGER
pH 8.5
MILL RUN F3-1543

Undat

LIBRARY OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

T H E S I S

" Chaucer's Transition from Allegory
or Artificial Art to Realism."

by

R. H. DOBSON

CHAUCER'S TRANSITION FROM
ALLEGORY OR ARTIFICIAL ART
TO REALISM.

An Allegory is a figurative representation conveying a meaning other than and in addition to the literal. It is distinguished from a metaphor by being longer sustained and more fully carried out in its details, and from an Analogy by the fact that one appeals to the imagination and the other to the reason. It has been a favorite form of literature with every nation. The Hebrews used it for their religious teaching; there are numerous instances to be found in the classics; and it was a favorite device in European literature.

In mediaeval times the use of the allegory was very prevalent. Allegorical interpretations were employed wherever reason or fancy could possibly introduce them. Religious interpretations and moral interpretations of natural history were popular forms of the use of the allegory. From these it was a short step to allegorical invention. This particular form of literary expression, to us very wearisome, seemed to have some special appeal to the mediaeval type of mind, and was exceedingly popular.

It reached the climax of its perfection at this time and thereafter speedily declined. The cause of this decline was the fact that the artificial conventions had become so cumbersome that they destroyed the very desire that they were intended to stimulate.

On the other hand Realism deals with life, its emotions and actions in its actual surroundings and conditions. This is not an ideal artificial condition but plain facts of human life and experience, even though at times coarse and brutal.

Our aim in this thesis shall be to show Chaucer's transition from this artificial art to his place in the forefront of realism. We can not however, say that Chaucer's poetry ever lacked touches of Realism nor can we deny that some of even his late poems were partially allegorical in nature.

English poetry of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was largely influenced by French examples. this was due to the fact that English language and poetry had not reached a universally accepted form, while the French had been established by its popularity. This accepted form of French poetry was inventive allegory based on various classic myths (Gesta Romanorum) or the popular tabliaux.

These allegorical poems were not without their charms. Though rather wearying to the modern student they had many attractions for the readers of that period. The various points which prove tedious to present day students, were considered the best of ornaments. Typical of these artificial embellishments and machinery were, the dream,



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2017 with funding from
University of Alberta Libraries

<https://archive.org/details/dobson1910>

the May morning, the garden, the fair company, etc.

In this class of poetry the plot was of minor consideration and showed little dramatic arrangement. Sometimes it was interesting enough but apparently more by chance than by design. The real interest centred around the artificialities of the poem. Each poet might arrange these various "set pieces" in new combinations, yet they were the same bowers, flowers, sunrises, sunsets, song-birds, etc., which had been used by every "courtly maker" for the past hundred years. The language used was stilted and full of long quotations from the classics, while the characters were most unreal. The metre as shown in the *Roman de la Rose*, which Chaucer translated in the same original metre, is the octosyllabic couplet in common use by the French poets. This metre prevented the use of descriptive words, which were replaced by flowery phrases.

Chaucer's early life was spent at the English court under the patronage of John of Gaunt. Here he would naturally feel the influence of French poetry of the day. He had access to many French manuscripts which only the richer classes could afford. It would seem that Chaucer had been totally unaware of the existence of any literature save French and Classical English until his first embassy to Italy in 1370.

Among the manuscripts which fell into his hands, we are certain that there were those of Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meurig and Machault. His latent genius was stirred by the *Romaunt de la Rose*, and he set himself to the translation of it. The *Romaunt de la Rose* was the universally acknowledged masterpiece of French poetry, and the delight of the Court so that this poem was the most natural selection for Chaucer, as he was French in descent and his life and education at Court had familiarized him with the French language. In France this poem was the dominant work of poetic literature, "and the source whence every rhymers drew for his need"-- down to the

period of the classical revival. In England the influence was only slightly inferior upon both matter and form of poetry.

In his translation Chaucer stuck very closely to the original text, thereby acquiring the germs for felicitous phrases such as the famous designation of Nature as "the vicaire of th'Almighty Lorde" which he uses in the Parlement of Foules. But the main service which the work of this translation rendered to him was the opportunity of practicing and perfecting a happy and ready choice of words. The Romaunt de la Rose exercised on Chaucer, an influence greater than any other single work, supplying him with poetic forms and machinery, which he was slow to outgrow and with reminiscences of particular passages which leave their trace in some of his best and latest work. For example, the Prioress is a pleasant, tender-hearted but rather affected person who cares more about fine manners than about austerity: Hints for this character are evidently due to memories of the Romaunt de la Rose.

The Romaunt de la Rose was the work of two authors Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung. De Lorris who wrote the first part was not remarkable for original genius but brought together the thoughts and sentiments of his own time in Book I. He was fortunate in the discovery of a new subject which he treated with ingenuity. Instead of a narrative of warlike adventures he gives his readers a psycho-logical romance in which a combination of symbolizations and personified abstractions supply the characters of the moral conflicts represented. After writing about one fifth of the 22,000 verses of which the original French poem consists, De Lorris who had executed his part of the task in full sympathy with the spirit of the chivalry of his times,

died, and left the work to be continued by another trouvère. Jean de Meung took up the thread of his predecessor's poem, and transformed the chivalrous allegory into a popular satire. The spirit of the poem was wholly changed. De Lorris had set out to write an allegory of life and de Meung wrote on every topic of mediaeval life in the mood of a bitter satirist. While DeLorris supplied Chaucer with his appropriate phrasing and furnished the proper allegorical machinery for artificial poetry, yet De Meung was to Chaucer a storehouse from which he constantly drew. De Meung's keenest satire was directed against women and the clergy and Chaucer imitates him in this respect as may be seen in the depiction of Wife of Bath and the Monk. Chaucer's own intellectual life may be described as a transition from the standpoint of De Lorris to that of De Meung.

Chaucer's work as translator of the Romaunt de la Rose, though it helped him in the ways already mentioned, hindered his genius. As an imitator he adopted the allegorical style for many years. This style did not encourage the dramatic talent which was inherent in him, and constantly seeking expression. While seeking for the right vehicle for his poetry, he adopted this artificial style always giving to it such touches of nature and real feeling that we realize his uneasiness of mind. He was but following the examples of many other writers, for the Romaunt de la Rose was widely imitated by writers of all nations.

In another and very different way was Chaucer the imitator of Machault. To him he went for metrical help, pleasant rhymes and harmonious sounds. Machault had introduced the ballads rondeaux and virelais and of these Chaucer copied not a few. He imitated the form and very often the subjects in these shorter poems.

He seemed never to be seeking the expression of thought but rather attempting to reach perfection of style and versification. Chaucer was never a true exponent of the lyric art. He did not have the passion and fire, nor the airy fancy necessary for the production of successful lyrics. He was by nature the narrator of tales, rather than the singer of ballads and rondels.

Machault's poems then furnished the models for Chaucer's imitations and Machault was well suited to teach this eager pupil, already possessed of great poetic qualities, anxious to obtain skill in the technique of his art. In spite of Machault's prosiness and insufferably long debates about points of amorous etiquette, he was a musician as well as a poet and had a lasting concern for art and harmony. He was ever testing new groupings of verses and fresh combinations of rhymes. Chaucer learned well of this master, and his verse forms became equally harmonious and intricate. The first words of Machault's *Did de la Marguerite* were so graceful that Chaucer embodies them in his Prologue to the Legend of Good Women and dwells on the graceful thoughts of the

"dayesye of all floures flour
Fulfilde of vertu and of alle honour."

Chaucer may also have translated Machault's Book of the Lion as he mentions this work of his pen at the end of the Parson's Tale. However, no trace of this translation has been found among his extant works. We have Machault's *Lay de Flour* with its varied and difficult stanzas reproduced in form in Chaucer's *Compleynt of Anelida*. Two of Chaucer's most successful metres, the seven line stanza and the decasyllabic couplet were borrowed from Machault.

To such contemporaries as Froissart Deschamps and Otto de Granson, Chaucer was indebted for certain subjects. Some of the works of these authors he translated word for word as in his *Compleynt to Venus* ll. 79-82, where he gives us

the English for de Granson's stanzas. In his *Merciles Beaute* he was probably working along the lines of two short poems by Eustache Deschamps. The passion displayed by Chaucer in the first and second of these models is not the lyric passion but rather an example of his powers of imitation, for in the third group he scoffs at his style and sentiment. But this practice on ballads, rondeaux, etc., made possible the burning stanzas of *Troilus* and *Criseyde* where he view in passion with Boccaccio. In the *Prioress's Tale*, this training enables him to bring into play all the resources of a highly trained style in order to suggest a suave artlessness. Possibly his art untrained, might not have been equal to the task of portraying the energy and vividness of the couplet of the *Knights' Tale*. His comic verse, strong and of peculiar piquancy, with its strong, regular rythm, which is yet supple enough to render the inflexions of the speaking voice, is in some part the result of the long and varied exercises in lyrical expression, by which he prepared himself.

Chaucer also interested himself somewhat ironically in the tençons of the comparative merits of the leaf and the flower. He shows this interest in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good women*. He also associated himself with the symbolical worship of the "*Marguerite*" (or *dayesye*) which in the latter half of the century, out of regard for some great ladies of that name, displaced the worship of the rose. Chaucer was a reader of the works of many other French

writers, and inevitable touches are discovered in his own poems from these writers. To some he owes plot ideas, to others a phrase or line of poetry, but to de Lorris, de Meung and Machault is his principal debt.

The intellectual influence of the Romaunt de la Rose and the metrical influence of Machault, stand out as the two important factors contributed by French literature to Chaucer's development. In his reading and translation Chaucer became saturated with the spirit of these writers, and never entirely threw off their influence. For years he was the "courtly maker", though from the beginning of his original poetry we find a trace of impatience with the limitations of this method of expression.

The decadence of this style of poetry had already begun in France, though it was not yet noticeable. It was stifled and exhausted by a maze of convention and allegory. It was dying from the very ideal to which Chaucer strove to add new lustre, and which would have proved his undoing, but for his tendency to realism and his good fortune of creating for England a literary language; and being the first to use it for poetical purposes.

The chief of Chaucer's Allegorical poems are the Book of the Duchess, Parlement of Foules, House of Fame and Prologue to Legende of Goode Women. The Book of the Duchess belongs to what we might term his first or French period when the influence of the Romande la Rose was strong in his mind. This poem is original in substance though not in form. The Parlement of Foules and House of Fame were written towards the end of the second period when the

Italian influence dominated him. The *Legende of Goode Women* was written just prior to his planning for his great poems, the *Canterbury tales*. Yet this flow of allegorical writings was not uninterrupted for we find interspersed through the various periods typical realistic poems or parts of poems, e.g. *Troilus and Criseyde*, which depicts vividly in so many places Chaucer as a realist, is followed by the Allegorical poems the *Parlement of Foules* and the *House of Fame*.

All these poems are markedly allegorical and present the typical allegorical machinery--the May morn, the lover's dream, the garden, etc. The *Book of the Duchess* written in 1369, on the occasion of the death of Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster, is Chaucer's first original allegory. In it an elaborate framework is constructed around the essential theme of the poem. This framework is purely conventional and shows many of the devices borrowed from the *Romaunt de la Rose*. The elegy commences with a proem, in which he tells how, being unable to sleep and suffering from an incurable disease, (inflicted by *merciles beaute*) he has a book brought him, wherein he reads from the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid, the story of Clyx and Alcyone, reaching the point where Alcyone dies on the third day. Chaucer stops reading here, as he has discovered a new deity, Morpheus, the god of sleep. He vows to pay Morpheus a feather-bed, and a pair of doves, and then falls asleep on his book. While sleeping he dreams that he is awakened one May morning by the song of birds. It was

"The most solempne servyse
By note that every man
Had heard."

The windows of his room are painted with the stories of Troy and the walls with the Romaunt de la Rose. He hears horns and joins the hunting party of Octavian (Edward III). He strays aside and meets a knight in black who sits under an oak lamenting. He asks the cause of his grief and the knight (John of Gaunt) complains that Fortune in a game of chess has cheated him and stolen his queen. He had always been Love's tributary and one day chanced upon a company of fair ladies where he fell in love with "the goode faire white." He describes her beauty and goodness at great length. He pleads his love to her, and she refuses him, but at the end of a year yields to his suit and they are married, Chaucer here gives a lovely picture of the chivalrous ideal of marriage:--

"For treuely that swete wyght,
When I had wrong and she the ryght,
She wolde always so goodily
Forgive me so debonairely:
.....
And thus we lyved full many a yeare
So wel, I kan not telle how."

After some unnecessary questions it appears that the knight now laments the death of his peerless wife. Chaucer replied "Is that your losse? By God it is routhe." Then the Emperor is seen returning from the hunt to his castle, and as a bell rings for noon, the poet awakes and determines to commit the dream to poetry.

Such is the story and throughout it abounds with artificial conventions as found in the Romaunt de la Rose. We have the dream and the awakening on a May morning. In the book of the Duchess he is awakened by the song of birds while in the Romaunt de la Rose he goes to the woods to hear the birds sing. These are the stories on the windows

II

and walls of the poet's room, corresponding in idea to the pictures on the outside of the garden walls in the Romaunt de la Rose. There are the allegorical characters as Love, Fortune and "the goode faire white." Everywhere are long tedious discourses. There is a fair park of singing birds instead of a garden. Even the portrait of the Knight's lady is rather an assemblage of fair qualities than a description of a real character. In this description of his lost lady, there are touches of Machault. Chaucer has happily appropriated Machault's verse and thought and converted it into something beautiful. We find in this picture by Chaucer perhaps the most life-like picture of maidenhood in the whole range of our literature, beginning:

" I saw her dance so comelily
.....not overthwart."

Another touch of Machault is found in the above mentioned ideal of marriage, which in part is a pretty close translation of some lines of Machault's Jugement due bon roi de Behaigne.

In writing this poem Chaucer called to his aid all his stores of knowledge and all his art. He embodies in this elegy his previously written story of Clyx and Alcyone, an imitation of Ovid and uses many lines from Machault. In the Book of the Duchess, in spite of the borrowed conventions and the artificialities, the subject being original, and the touches of Nature genuine, the tale is one of simplicity and truth, told in a natural, effective manner. There is a certain realness and freshness that provides a lasting charm to this allegorical poem which was not found in the models provided by Chaucer's teachers.

In the Parlement of Foules however, the production seems so English, so fresh from Nature's own inspiration, so instinct with gaiety from Chaucer's own heart, that one is apt to overlook the undeniable vestiges of French and Italian influence. It shows how Chaucer was beginning to select as well as to assimilate the loans. He still is on the beaten paths but merrily on the alert for touches of nature and real life.

In the Parlement of Foules, the source of his imagery as well as the subject is English. The vivacity and joyousness of his temperament enhance his passages of dialogue and add force and freshness to his passages of description. Even when enumerating his list of birds and trees he gives graphic descriptions true to details. His style here seems to be perfect and as for composition, his poem carries out to the full what he intends it should. It expresses the mind of Chaucer both through the comic dialogues of the birds in their assembly and the music of its solemn verse. The idea is French, as the device of the Parlement of birds is a French idea older than the Romaunt de la Rose. It would seem that Chaucer is still holding back and practising on familiar ground and is gradually working into his poetry all he can manage from Italian books. It is one of Chaucer's masterpieces and shows many traces of his reading, yet the spirit, gaiety humor and love of nature are Chaucer's, and as a whole the poem is as original as Shakespeare's "As you Like It".

Chaucer exhibits in this poem a tendency to escape the limitations of the allegory in many ways. One striking illustration of this escape is noted when the goose rushes in with a certain resolution which provokes uproarious ridicule of other birds led by the sparrow-hawk.

By far the most noteworthy poem written during the time when Chaucer was most subject to Italian influence was *Troilus and Criseyde*. It was a tragedy according to Chaucer's own definition. It was a lengthy poem partly translated and partly adapted from Boccaccio's *Filostrato*. Nevertheless the poem is so transformed, and the characters so changed that it seems a different tale. Chaucer discarded more than one-half of Boccaccio's work and added about twice as much of his own composition.

Boccaccio's *Filostrato* is undoubtedly a masterpiece. It is the most beautiful of those poems, in which Boccaccio expressed the voluptuousness of his sojourn in Naples and his youthful passion for Maria d'Aguino, the daughter of King Robert. She comes to us as a true woman, not idealized, whose charm, beauty and fickleness were brought out by Boccaccio in various stories. At once a realist and romanticist, he was able, in the framework of an impersonal tale, to portray the vivid picture of a heart stricken by love, in a pseudo-homeric garb. His *Filostrato* is one of the most enthralling accounts of compelling passion. In this he centres the interest around three characters *Criseyde*, *Troilus* and *Pandarus*.

This poem supplied the data upon which Chaucer built the first great love-poem written in the English language, one which had no equal until Shakespeare wrote the story of *Romeo and Juliet*. In his poem, Chaucer preserved almost all the passionate descriptions which indicate that he introduced hardly any alterations in the character of *Troilus*, the brave warrior enslaved by love. *Criseyde* is changed somewhat from

the portrait we have of her by Boccaccio, while Pandarus, the youthful friend metamorphosed into the worldly-wise, cynical uncle of Criseyde, who alternately jokes with her and causes her to laugh until her sides ache, and gives questionable advice. Just here Chaucer gives us a fine display of his power to depict a human character. Pandarus is for all time a typical light comedy character. Chaucer does not use the blackest of colors to paint him nor does he create a monster of vice, but with fine dramatic instinct he invents a good-natured, loquacious go-between, full of proverbial philosophy and invaluable experience, who admirably practises as well as preaches his art. He might seem unreal and impossible if Chaucer had not succeeded in imparting life to him. In this we can see that, following the example of Boccaccio's invention, Chaucer breaks away from the conventional rules and depicts real, living persons.

Although a modern author might have told this tale in a shorter and more pointed form, he could not have put into it more individuality nor shown more true insight into human affairs. The story is outstandingly realistic. The scene is undeniably pictured in London. We are sure of this by the reference to the cobblestones etc., which would apply to London of that period. Other mediaeval touches Chaucer makes are the references to Troy as a moated and turreted city of the middle ages. Again in Book V he advises those who are disappointed in love to turn to religious affairs and to love Him who dies upon the Cross. Also in the signatures of the letters of Troilus and Criseyde, the French "La vostre C" etc., is used.

Chaucer's realism is brought out in this poem in very many ways. In the long speeches of Troilus, the fearful lover, the bashfulness, the uncertainty of the victim of the divine passion, is well portrayed. Criseyde, on retiring to her chamber to ponder over the first revelation of Troilus' love for her is realistically portrayed.

"Criseyde arose, no longer there she stayed,
But straight into her closet went anon,
And set her down, as still as any stone,
And every word gan up and down to wind,
That he had said, as it came to her mind."

Again when she sees her lover riding past in triumph, she muses as follows:-

"So like a man of armes and a knight
He was to see, filled full of high powers,
For both he had a body and a might,
To do that thing, as well as hardiness."
"And aye the people cried, "Here comes our joy,
And, next his brother, holder up of Troy."

How skillfully does he depict the scene where Troilus falls in love with Criseyde at first sight and further does he depict with deep insight, the gradual awakening of the love in the heart of Criseyde. Chaucer sympathetically tells of the love scenes between them and prolongs it in the first part of the poem while he hurriedly passes over the later unpleasant part which tells of the unfaithfulness of Criseyde.

How wonderfully natural is the description of Criseyde's bevy of lady visitors attracted by the news that she is shortly to be surrendered to the Greeks! They come to console her and remain to gossip, while poor Criseyde wishes they would depart as her heart is burning all the while with love for Troilus, of which they know nothing. Numerous other examples might be quoted to show his

vivacity and the keenness of his wit, his playful humor, his true estimates of character and his sense of dramatic fitness.

In Boccaccio's poem the author's aim had been to paint sentimentality but Chaucer's aim was to reflect actual life. In this work Chaucer is part English and part Italian but in his last great poem he will be wholly English. We may note here that the step is not far from the easily imperfectly realized conceptions of Chaucer's to his perfect depictions in *Troilus and Criseyde* and the *Canterbury Tales*. It was a natural step from the description of Pandarus to the Wife of Bath, and from the goose in the Parlement of Foules to the Miller, etc. After writing the dramatic story of *Troilus and Criseyde* Chaucer turns once more to the conventional allegory and gives us the two uncompleted poems of the House of Fame and Legend of Good Women.

Chaucer seems to delight once more in the freedom of allegory where he can linger over details or bring in extraneous matter, as in his disquisition on dreams and the epitomized story of Virgil's *Aeneid*. He wanders on from one point to another of his allegory, seeming to glory in a half mischievous way, in the privilege of dallying here and there to give self-revealing glimpses of his daily life, his reading, character and turn of mind, and his readers enjoy this abandon of mood which he displays in his return to the allegory. Here he allows his thoughts to wander at will and he is not bound down by the necessity of making definite progress towards a definite end.

While reading the House of Fame we can

almost watch the poet at work. It is his plan to write a comedy on the model of Dante only in a lighter vein, choosing an ethical theme instead of a religious one and he bethinks him of the notable description of Fame in Virgil and of her palace in the Metamorphoses of Ovid. With the aid of a little disquisition on dreams from Macrobius he twists these various strands into a very original poem and then puts it aside until he can think of a suitable and effective ending which never occurs to him. The poem might be described as that of Dante retold by a humorist. It is not a parody but verse and tone are in a lower key. It is an elaborate working out of the allegorical treatment but the allegories are of his own making. But the allegory is not the best thing about the poem. He has not the capacity for the sustained purpose and careful artifice which are the chief conditions of a good allegory. Reality has too many attractions for him and he cannot remain a slave to fancy very long.

Even at the outset of his remarkable journey Chaucer's humor cannot resist a touch of realism and he works up a discussion with the eagle on the question of natural sciences which he claims should not interfere with the work of a poet. He humorously shows us the anxious teacher and the unwilling pupil. Another happy touch of Chaucer's humor is the question of the various rewards bestowed by Fame upon the claimants for favor, including the ready grant of evil fame to those who desire it and the scarcity of those who wish their good works to remain in obscurity and to be their own reward. In his talk with the eagle

he tells us more about himself than he does in any other poem.

The House of Fame, which is a dream poem, might almost have been written on a wager to show that he could bring in everything traditional and most common in the old artificial poetry and yet be original and fresh through it all. The framework of the allegory is worn very lightly while the poem teems with personal touches e.g. his matrimonial experiences. In this poem he adopts the tone of a shrewd and humorous spectator rather than of a novice awed by the mysteries into which he was being initiated. The whole poem leads up to nothing more than a description and the platitudes that the decrees of fame are capricious and that rumor exaggerates and distorts. Chaucer used his humor, his imagination and his learning to enrich this poor theme but he could not round off the poem to his liking so he left it. The old forms which he used so successfully for the sportive Parlement of Foules, failed him in his more ambitious attempt and he may have received his first hint that the proper subjects of his poetry were not mystological abstractions but the men and women he saw around him. It is not a little remarkable that both the House of Fame and the Legende of Goode Women were both left unfinished. These immediately precede the Canterbury Tales. It seems as if Chaucer was casting about for some new method of expression which should exactly suit him and was unable to satisfy himself in either of these poems, which yet contain such admirable work.

This poem offers much in its details that is characteristic of Chaucer's genius, as point-

ting in the direction Chaucer was subsequently to follow. We may specially note the company thronged in the House of Rumor, shipmen, pilgrims, the two most numerous kinds of travellers in Chaucer's age, fresh from seaport or sepulchre with scrip brimfull of unauthenticated intelligence. He here takes the opportunity of enumerating the writers he most admires, e.g. Josephus, Homer, Boccaccio, Virgil, etc.

In those poems wherein he returns to the allegorical after his realistic efforts he shows no hostility towards the allegorical. He readily returns to it after writing such a realistic poem as Troilus and Criseyde. It seems to be merely a reaction where he comes back to the old form after throwing off his apparent restraint in the other class of poetry.

The prologue alone in the Legende of Good Women is allegorical. In the second part he tells the story of good women but the theme seemed to grow monotonous and he became tired of it. Consequently he leaves it only partially completed. We can notice as he proceeds that the subject is rather distasteful to him, i.e. he finds it difficult to portray all women chaste and beautiful, when history or myth does not make them so, and the men all libertines or vicious. We may notice a flippancy in dealing with some of the characters for example, in the question of Aeneas and Dido in the cave episode where he slyly adds that the author makes of it no mention whether any accompanied them. Again in Phyllis, the second last of his legends, in a frolicsome, sportive and flippant mood he advises the women "trusteth, as in love, no man but me."

The prologue has all the external machinery of the allegory, the May morning, the birds, the garden, etc. The poet went out to kneel by his favorite flower, the daisy. Then on his return home, he sleeps and dreams that the God of Love may be seen coming through the garden, leading by the hand a noble queen and followed by nineteen beautiful ladies in royal habits. The poet is condemned for the books he has written disparaging to woman and is made swear that he will sing the praises of women who have been faithful all their lives.

The rules of the task demanded that he should create a new order of humanity where the women were perfect and the men faithless and heartless. Chaucer was well able to do this in a single instance or even more but he could not prolong these fictions. He graphically describes the meekness, patience and purity of a woman's heart as well as its devotion and bitter anguish. But his temperament was such that he could not continue this interminably and his enthusiasm began to pall. He cannot help becoming ironical over his heroines and their troubles.

In the second part the allegory is done away with entirely and the poet gives free play to his simple and kindly humanity. The poems enabled him to discover wherein his genius lay and it is not improbable that one of his reasons for leaving it so abruptly was in order to carry out the larger and better plan of the Canterbury Tales, wherein all his genius was at last to have full scope.

Chaucer now enters upon a third period which may be described as the English period. It is

true that even in this period he does not absolutely break away from all allegorical influence but in it he depicts real characters and gives detailed descriptions characteristic of each. Especially in the prologue to the Canterbury Tales is this noticeable. Here he gives life portraits of the different members of the company, so real that they are vividly impressed on our minds, and remain so, only becoming more and more vivid as we read through the Tales. Their stories are not always real or original. In some cases the tales appear to have been written before he had arranged the definite plan of the Canterbury Tales.

Chaucer's conception of the scheme seems to have been original. It is possible that the idea entered his mind after reading Boccaccio's Decamerone. Boccaccio, in his great work tells of a company of seven ladies and three men who had fled from Florence to escape the plague and who took refuge in a beautiful garden, and there to while away the time, each tells ten stories, mostly of amorous adventure, until the complete hundred are finished. It is customary to say that Chaucer received his plan from these tales. If he did, adopt the Italian work as his model, he so changed it that one can scarcely see any vestiges of the original in it. Instead of following the gruesome plan of Boccaccio where these people flee from the suffering around them to fritter away their time amid those amorous scenes, Chaucer happily hits upon the plan of depicting a band of thirty pilgrims out on a holiday.

It had long been the custom to make annual pilgrimages to the tomb of Thomas Becket, and although at this time the question of the religious benefit derived from them was questioned,

still it was looked upon as a holiday and was freely participated in by all orders of society. Thus we may look upon the party as a representative holiday party leisurely wending its way towards Canterbury. These take the place of the heartless, careless people of Boccaccio's stories. Whether he was consciously improving on the Italian model or not, the fact remains, that the conception of the scheme is a much happier one than that of Boccaccio.

Chaucer showed his impatience at the restrictions in the class of poetry which he had been writing prior to the Canterbury Tales, by his occasional restlessness and cynicism in the Parlement of Foules and Legende of Good Women, etc., and seemed to be casting about for a new plan. He seemed quite capable of estimating what he had done; as few authors had a sounder judgment, so much self-knowledge, or so critical a spirit. He was still living at his house in Greenwich along the Canterbury Road, where the pilgrims flocked to Becket's shrine. Probably the sight of so many pilgrims of all classes, nobility, artisans, women etc., awakened in his mind the possibility of making such a poem. If he had known Boccaccio's work at this time, he must have realized the greater possibility in his own scheme, for Boccaccio's tales depicted people all of one rank of life, while this contained people of all ranks. When he had discovered or hit upon this idea, the rest was very easy, He, at once commences to describe these pilgrims, their manners, dress and rank, and the individual characters. As a result we have the inimitable prologue. The next step was to arrange that each character tell an appropriate tale. While in the Decamerone the framework has little re-

lation to the stories told; in the Canterbury Tales it is one of the most important features of the whole work.

The plan which Chaucer decided upon was to first describe this assemblage of persons from various classes and calling in life all bent on reaching one goal, and also to tell of the way in which they agreed to amuse themselves by the way. In a prologue this was to be accomplished and the succeeding series of poems were to the stories told by the pilgrims en route. Then in order to prevent a feeling that the stories were merely a collection of poems chosen at random and most unskilfully arranged, he links them to each other by the interludes or dialogues among the members of the little band. The development of the character of the host in these links is also a strong factor towards preserving the unity of the plot.

At the beginning of the Canterbury Tales we are placed in the heart and centre of English life; amidst the gay bustle and confusion of a band of gay pilgrims of all ranks and orders of life, gathered for a holiday jaunt. These circumstances and chance meetings suggest possibilities of serious and humorous situations and conversations. The meeting place is the Tabard Inn in Southwark, the host of which is the typical, jolly man of the world; Harry Bailey. After they have paid their reckoning Harry Bailey, treating them as an equal, steps in with the proposal that on their journey of the following days they while away the tedium of the long hours of travel by each telling four tales, two out and two back, and the one who tells the best tale shall

shall be rewarded with a dinner at common expense on their return to the Tabard Inn. All gladly welcome this means of diversion.

The host appoints himself as judge, critic and master of ceremonies, and on the morrow when the journey has been started, he calls on the most important member to commence his tale viz. the knight.

Such was Chaucer's plan for his collection of tales. If his scheme had been followed out there would have been one hundred and twenty tales in all, but there are actually only twenty-three tales told. Yet these bring out the most salient features of Chaucer's plan which was intended to lie in its variety of characters and the effects of their tales and society upon each other.

Each character is distinctly marked out in the prologue and the characteristics given there are sustained throughout the poem; in the connecting passages between the tales and the prologue to each particular tale, as well as in the tales themselves. The prologue presents a long array of life-like portraits aptly sketched in a few masterly words. These characters are so genuinely human that they are as typical today as then. Many an artist has sought to put on canvas these wonderful portraits, but they stand out so vividly in our minds that the task seems almost unnecessary.

In the tales Chaucer shows a wide variety of stories. He deals with both the romantic and the real. As examples we have the Knight's Tale and the Squire's Tale as typically romantic tales, while

the Miller, Reeve etc., tell tales typically realistic. Besides these we find the ordinary typical mediaeval stories and sermons, e.g. Melibens and the Parson's tale; also the development of the old fabliaux as in the Nonne Preste's Tale. According to Chaucer's plan these tales are well mixed and we have so great a variety that they do not become tedious. He also managed to arrange that what some one of the raconteurs says may incense another of the company who can scarcely await his chance to tell a tale disparaging to his travelling companion.

Some of the most amusing specimens of Chaucer's realism, which show his humorous insight, and observation are to be found in the links which connect the tales. The host calls upon one member of the company to contribute his share of the outlined program. During the ensuing tale, some remark which may intentionally or not, seem pointed at one of his fellow-travellers, stirs that one to a desire for retaliation. The latter can scarcely await his opportunity to recite some incident as a counter-thrust at the last speaker's expense. This sparring is never carried too far, for mine host, is ever on the alert to preserve the good spirits of his little company. He interferes where necessary and sets matters right. His criticisms are very revealing as to his views of life in general and he never hesitates to voice them. These are usually accepted in good part, but sometimes cut too deeply for kindly acceptance, as in his criticism of the Pardoner's utterances and revelations. The Pardoner becomes angry, but the courteous knight restores peace and "Anon they kiss and

and ridden on hir way." One special occasion of sparring and matching of wits occurs between the Reeve and Miller, with their vulgar attacks upon the occupation of the other. Other minor difficulties occur, all told in Chaucer's own slyly humorous or mildly ironical style. The Prologues spoken by some of the characters before their tales are also very human. Noticeable among these is that of the Pardoner and the one spoken by the Wife of Bath. In each of these the handling is masterly.

The Pardoner was typical of numerous such men who roamed through England. He is a humorous rogue. When called upon by the host to tell "some mirthe or japes right anon," to drive from their minds the horrors of the Physician's tale, he declares he must first stop at a nearby inn and "wol both drinke and eten of a cake." This he does, then makes a cynical confession of all the tricks of his trade; after which he tells the tale of the three roysterers and their violent deaths, with much sternness. This character must have been drawn from life, and drawn by the clever pen of an artist in the portrayal of character. The leaving out of the prologue to his tale would have meant the loss of an amusing recital of the practices of this dealer in indulgences. The country people could not doubt a man who could quote scripture and who attacked vices just like their own parson. It is well to remember that he delivers his eulogy of sobriety on coming out of a drinking-booth.

Some diverting situations occur which add realistic touches to the series of narratives. Sometimes the master of ceremonies does not allow

the narratives to run their course, but interrupts as in the case of Chaucer's own tale of Sir Thopas. He says his "eres aken" and he cannot tolerate such "dogerel." At his bidding the rhyming is broken off, and the tale of Melibens is given in prose. We moderns are inclined to wish Sir Thopas, a clever parody full of sly hits, had been allowed to reach a conclusion in preference to the long, tedious moralizing on the virtue of forgiveness.

The quarrel between the Cook of London and the Manciple, ending with the drunken cook's fall from his horse, is quite diverting and real.

Some of the outstanding characters with whom we feel quite well acquainted ere we leave them, are mine host, the pardoner, the parson, the Wife of Bath and the Prioress.

Harry Bailey, mine host of the Tabard Inn, becomes a past master in his own calling. He knows full well how to amuse and control crowds like this. He is a worldling, full of shrewd insight and ready to voice popular sentiment on any and all subjects. He does not dislike a scurrilous tale, but cannot see any reason for preaching, and quickly calls for a "merrie tale" whenever some pious sould has touched the hearts of the little band by some religious moral or more serious narrative. He is ever on the alert for hints of Lollardry and ever impatient of too much show of learning. He scoffs at the timid, laughs with the boisterous, speaks his mind freely on all occasions, and manages the pilgrimage with much address of a bold and blustering sort. He is an excellent contrast for such characters

as the Parson and the Clerk of Oxford, the religious and studious types. Chaucer does not give us a detailed description of the host but brings him in so vividly on so many occasions that after reading the Canterbury Tales no character stands out portrayed so graphically as his.

We have already spoken of the Pardoner and his open vaunting of the prevalent trickery and knavery practiced by his ilk, under the cloak of religion. How well has Chaucer given us the picture of his opposite, the truly religious parson, simple and godly, brother to the honest plowman! He lived only to serve God and his parishioners. He cares nought for the collecting of tithes, but no weather could prevent him reaching the sick or unfortunate. He lives the precepts he preaches, helps the needy and sinful but does not hesitate to snub the obstinate whether of high or low estate. His story is a sermon on Penitence and Confession, penance and absolution ending with a retraction of Chaucer's "translacions and inditings of worldly vanities" i.e. Troilus, Book of Fame, etc., the sinful ones and many others forgotten. This retraction is believed to be spuriously interpolated by Roman Catholic monks. Here we see Chaucer's sympathetic handling and his sincere respect for a truly good man.

He paints with some humor but also with respect, the Priorness lisping her "Stratford-atte-Bowe" French, and being very careful and conscious of her deportment, who tells so perfectly the story of the little Christian boy murdered by the Jews because of his love for the Blessed Virgin. Such stories were very common in the

Middle Ages, and we can imagine the store of these religious tragedies which would be treasured in convents, both in the manuscripts and in the minds of the religious occupants of the convents. The story is perfectly suited to its narrator, and is beautiful in its touching simplicity.

In strong contrast is the Wife of Bath who is the very essence of satire against women. In her prologue she is just as free in her unblushing revelations of herself and her most intimate relations with her five husbands, as was the Pardoner in his confessions. She is the typical, fell-blooded, sensuous, vulgar woman, who, nevertheless, does not seem to realize her own character, but rather glories in her "taking ways" with the men and her cleverness in managing them and their money. She glories in dress. Her story is such as we would expect from her, being of a sort that would tickle her own fancy. She loves to parade her good clothes and irreproachable conduct at church and on holy days. She freely offers to advise all maidens in their love affairs. Chaucer's handling of the character is masterly. In all ranks of life we find this type.

Chaucer derived some of his tales from the French fabliaux. The tales told by the Miller, the Reeve, the shipman, the Friar, the Somnour and the Merchant belong to the fabliaux. Some of the originals of these tales have been found while others have not. The Miller's tale belongs to the latter class, the original of which has not been found. Chaucer embodies these tales in his great scheme and gives them

certain English characteristics. In the prologues to the tales and the connecting links these various personages are described. The description of the Miller himself is typical of a certain class whom Chaucer often saw, with his reddish beard and on his nose the famous wart surrounded by a tuft of hair, the two black holes of his nose and his mouth as big as a furnace. In the Miller's tale he mentions the clerk as belonging to Oxford. He sends his knave and wench to London also. The expression "harrow and alas" were in common use in England as a cry against wrong or aggression. By these and other instances Chaucer manages to arrange these fabliaux, though derived from a foreign source, so that they appear typical of English life and character.

From this short outline we may see how Chaucer, the grand translator and imitator of the artificial poetry of France, is awakened by the realism of Italian art in poetry and becomes the realistic chronicler of English life at the end of the fourteenth century. Chaucer was a realist from the beginning, as we see by the realistic touches in his most artificial poems, and needed but a view of the new, realistic field of literature to convince him of his possibilities in this realm. After some experimenting with the new form he finally breaks away from the use of time-worn allegories and with real enjoyment and enthusiasm plunges into the realm of Realism. The result of this is the splendid poem "The Canterbury Tales."

